

It's Time for a Woman to Head the FCC

It seemed to be a milestone. After 99 years, at last a Latina — commissioner Edith Ramirez — has been chosen to chair the Federal Trade Commission. Edith has demonstrated her ability to implement policies that deliver consumer protection in a manner that also facilitates innovation and investment. Right choice, Mr. President!

Yet during Women's History Month, as we celebrated Edith's achievement, we were also reminded of how much farther we have to go.

Within the telecom policy world, a handful of authoritative trade circulars unabashedly reported what many leaders in our field are too embarrassed to say out loud.

One publication said this: "There's no quota on woman appointees and there are many other considerations ... However, we do believe the naming of Ms. Ramirez could give Mr. Obama some political cover if he wants to name a male FCC chair."

Another analyst reported, "There's speculation that since the president has now named a woman to head one regulatory agency, pressure to name a woman FCC chairman will abate."

You can't blame these analysts — they just reported what had become a quiet whisper.

Throughout the FTC's 99 years and the Federal Communications Commission's 79 years, every president has chosen only men to chair these powerful agencies. We can be sure that in all those years, no one has mused that the choice of a man to head one agency could disqualify all men from heading the other.

Why was it being suggested that President Obama must check a gender box when he chooses his agency chairs?

The fact that a woman has been chosen to run an agency should never constrain the leadership opportunities open to the extraordinary women who have served or are serving now in leadership roles at the FCC.

On April 10, the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council will convene to honor women who've served as FCC



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commissioners and senior executives. Four women reportedly under consideration for the chairmanship — commissioners Mignon Clyburn and Jessica Rosenworcel, former FCC legislative director Karen Kornbluh, and former FCC communications business opportunities director Cathy Sandoval — will join the MMTC's storytellers of women's FCC history.

These women stand on the shoulders of more than three dozen pioneers. Since 1948, when Frieda Hennock was sworn in, 15 women have served as FCC commissioners and 28 women have directed FCC bureaus and offices. Three women have served as chief of staff, two as general counsel, two as chief economist, and three as judges.

All of these women were well-prepared to chair the agency. Yet none has.

The FCC — whether led by a woman or a man — will have its hands full ensuring that women can put their powerful minds to work in the media and telecom industries. According to the National Association for Multi-Ethnicity in Communications, in 2011 women comprised only 30% of cable executives and 21% of telecommunications executives.

By any measure, the media and telecommunications are the nation's most important and influential industries. They make up one-sixth of the economy. They're our biggest net exporter. They create 72% of our new jobs. They connect us, unite us, educate us, entertain us, create and transmit our culture, and make our democracy possible. They serve us all.

And all of us should be able to serve them — whether it's managing the company, reporting the news on camera or behind the camera, climbing telephone poles, laying fiber, being a digital entrepreneur — or by chairing the FCC. ○

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